

## SAN FRANCISCO ROCK OF THE 1960s: THE SOUNDTRACK TO THE SUMMER OF LOVE

### Week Four: San Francisco Rock at the End of the 1960s and in the Early 1970s; The End of the Psychedelic Era

#### Recommended Listening:

**Big Brother & the Holding Company, *Cheap Thrills*** (Columbia, 1968). Despite a troubled, protracted genesis and getting patched together from both studio and live recordings, this was the album that (briefly) made Big Brother & the Holding Company into superstars. Reaching #1 in the charts, it included the hit "Piece of My Heart," their signature tune "Ball and Chain," and other favorites in "Combination of the Two," "I Need a Man to Love," and their psychedelic reinvention of the pre-rock standard "Summertime." The superstardom was brief for all but one member, as Janis Joplin left shortly after its release to go solo.

**Big Brother & the Holding Company, *Live at the Carousel Ballroom 1968*** (Columbia/Legacy, 2012). Recorded in concert on June 23, 1968, this isn't all that different from *Cheap Thrills*. But it has exciting live versions of the most popular *Cheap Thrills* songs, plus some more of their strongest tunes ("Coo Coo," "Down on Me," "Light Is Faster Than Sound") and more obscure odds and ends ("Flower in the Sun," "Call on Me").

**Big Brother & the Holding Company, *Live at Winterland '68*** (Columbia/Legacy, 1998). Yet another live concert, this one from April 1968, with a similar selection of songs as *Live at the Carousel Ballroom 1968*, with a few differences.

**Blue Cheer, *Vincebus Eruptum*** (Philips, 1968). One of the most popular San Francisco rock albums of the late 1960s, due mostly to the inclusion of their psychedelic overhaul of the late-'50s Eddie Cochran rockabilly classic "Summertime Blues." Though the smoke-rising-out-of-the-amplifiers intensity of the humming hard rock guitar riffs anticipates heavy metal, in the opinion of the instructor, aside from "Summertime Blues" it isn't very good, given to monotony, ham-handed heaviness, and histrionic vocals. Blue Cheer kept going for quite a while with some personnel changes, the most succinct overview of their career being the 1986 Rhino compilation *Louder Than God: The Best of Blue Cheer*.

**The Charlatans, *The Charlatans*** (Philips, 1969). There's no getting around it: the Charlatans' sole full-length album, both when it was released in 1969 and heard today, was/is a disappointing letdown given their status among the legendary San Francisco psychedelic scene originators. Only two of the members from their earlier and best lineup (Mike Wilhelm and Richie Olsen) remained by the time they finally got to do a real album, almost four years after they first made their mark on the region's music. But although the production is muted and some of the horn arrangements arguably inappropriate, it's not without some charm in its easy-rolling mix of blues, country, and

mild psychedelia, though there isn't much standout original material. The essence of the band is captured better on the 1965-68 recordings issued on the compilation *The Amazing Charlatans*, detailed in the handout for the first week of this class.

**The Grateful Dead, *Anthem of the Sun*** (Warner Brothers/Rhino, 1968). The second Grateful Dead album is even more polarizing than many of their studio efforts. Some see its free-floating, just short-of-jamming structures as an evocation of the psychedelic experience. Others are frustrated by the meandering and lack of songs, even as it shows Jerry Garcia's distinct eclectically roving guitar style continuing to develop.

**It's a Beautiful Day, *It's a Beautiful Day*** (Columbia, 1969). It's a Beautiful Day's debut album, and indeed their entire career, would be overshadowed by its gorgeous opening cut "White Bird." With its lilting hypnotic folk-rock melody, male-female duet vocals, and plucked violin, it was by far their most popular recording, to the point that it's the only It's a Beautiful Day song many people remember. The rest of the LP couldn't measure up to it, but though erratic it has its moments, usually when David LaFlamme's unusual violin and the haunting tunes come to the forefront, as they do on "Hot Summer Day" and "Girl with No Eyes."

**Jefferson Airplane, *After Bathing at Baxter's*** (RCA, 1967). The Airplane's third album was a bit of a surprise, and not as commercially successful as its predecessor *Surrealistic Pillow*, going into harder acid rock and some less tuneful extended jams. In part that was due to the retreat of Marty Balin, who wrote barely any material after being as important as any member with his songwriting and singing on their first two LPs. Some of it's tedious, but it has some classics when they tap their more melodic strengths on "Won't You Try/Saturday Afternoon" and "Martha."

**Jefferson Airplane, *Return to the Matrix 02/01/68*** (Collectors' Choice Music Live, 2010). Surprisingly high-fidelity two-CD live set at the small club at which Jefferson Airplane first made their name, with performances of most of the best songs from their first three albums (and some unimpressive songs that didn't make it onto those).

**Jefferson Airplane, *Live at the Fillmore East*** (RCA, 1998). There's so much live '60s Airplane out there that it's understandable if it's too much for anyone but fanatics to sift through. The live releases are all good, though, and here's another one, from New York shows on May 3 and May 4 of 1968. The majority of the songs appear on several other live CDs, but there are a few less traveled items, like "Greasy Heart" and "Wild Tyme."

**Jefferson Airplane, *Crown of Creation*** (RCA, 1968). *Crown of Creation* continued the Airplane's flight toward harder-rocking and, in some cases, stranger and less accessible material than the stuff that made them superstars on *Surrealistic Pillow*. Among the songs, however, were two of their most famous tunes, the title track and Grace Slick's haunting ballad of a man stuck in childhood (actually based on Airplane drummer Spencer Dryden), "Lather." Unable to get his former group the Byrds to record it due to its controversial depiction of promiscuity, David Crosby passed on one of his compositions to his Airplane friends for another of the album's highlights, "Triad."

**Jefferson Airplane, *Bless Its Pointed Little Head*** (RCA, 1969). The most well known Airplane live album, as it was actually released while they were at the peak of their fame, recorded in the Fillmore West and Fillmore East in October and November of 1968. Focusing on more elongated and psychedelic concert arrangements of their most popular early songs, it also adds a couple standout covers that they'd been doing for a long time onstage, Fred Neil's folk-rocker "The Other Side of This Life" and Donovan's "Fat Angel" (which actually mentions the Airplane).

**Mad River, *Mad River*** (Capitol, 1968). One of the oddest and least typical notable late-'60s Bay Area psychedelic albums, Mad River's debut stressed tense anxiety and dark intimations of madness and fear over utopian striving for a better world. Though at times excessive (as many San Francisco acid rock albums were), the frenetic guitar work, amphetamine-fueled air of paranoia, and Lawrence Hammond's distinctive quavering vocals are impressive, if not to everyone's taste. Mad River's second and final album, 1969's *Paradise Bar & Grill*, was far more sedate and country-rock-oriented, and not as interesting, though notable for a cameo poetry reading by famed author Richard Brautigan. Also worth hearing is their pre-album EP, included on the compilation *The Berkeley EPs* (see below).

**Lee Michaels, *Carnival of Life*** (A&M, 1967). An idiosyncratic solo artist, not always based in the Bay Area, who mixed soul and singer-songwriter elements into his keyboard-heavy psychedelic rock. While this debut album doesn't have a song as memorable as his one big hit single ("Do You Know What I Mean," 1971), it has some mighty impressive soulful wailing vocals and keyboards (and, on "Hello," very Summer-of-Love optimism) that put him somewhere between San Francisco psychedelia and early hard rock. His second album, 1968's *Recital* (also on A&M), is similar and also impressive, though not much of a departure from *Carnival of Life*.

**The Steve Miller Band, *Children of the Future*** (Capitol, 1968). Like much of Miller's early work, *Children of the Future* was an odd mixture of straightforward blues-rock and spacy flower-power-colored psychedelia (especially the title track). As with the Grateful Dead, his band's early records weren't as exciting as their reputation as one of San Francisco's hottest live acts led many to expect. Recorded in London, it also at times featured a surprising amount of Mellotron (an early synthesizer) that almost sounded as if it could have been airlifted from Moody Blues records. An important member of the lineup at this stage was future solo star Boz Scaggs, who in addition to playing second guitar took some lead vocals, writing and singing on one of the standout tracks, the bluesy shuffle "Baby's Callin' Me Home."

**The Steve Miller Band, *Sailor*** (Capitol, 1968). Miller's early albums are uneven enough that the best-of recommended on this course's general listening list is probably a better option for most people than his individual LPs. This continued the mixture of blues and psychedelia from his debut, and was more impressive the lighter and spacier it got, as it did on "Song for Our Ancestors" and "Quicksilver Girl." It did include one of his most popular early hard rockers, "Living in the U.S.A."

**The Steve Miller Band, *Brave New World*** (Capitol, 1969). Miller's third album suffered some loss of depth with the departure of Boz Scaggs, though otherwise it was more of the same blend of blues-rock and period late-'60s psychedelic rock. Though weaker than its predecessors, it also had one of his most beloved '60s tracks, "Space Cowboy."

**Various Artists, *Woodstock 40 Years On: Back to Yasgur's Farm*** (Rhino, 2009). There were several dozen performers at Woodstock from all over North America and the UK, not just San Francisco. However, San Francisco artists were a major presence, with Country Joe & the Fish, Santana, Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, Sly & the Family Stone, and Creedence Clearwater Revival all appearing. There have been a bewildering variety of different packages of Woodstock recordings, including the two volumes that appeared in the early 1970s, but also including more than one box set. This six-CD set is the most extensive, with material by all the performers mentioned above, although complete sets by Santana, Jefferson Airplane, Janis Joplin, and Sly & the Family Stone are available on the volumes for those artists in the series *The Woodstock Experience*.

#### **Recommended Books:**

***On the Road with Janis Joplin***, by John Byrne Cooke (Berkley Books, 2014). Cooke was road manager for Big Brother & the Company, and then Janis Joplin, for most of the last three years of Joplin's life. This is his account of his experiences, and not a superficial one, running 400 pages. There is some extraneous material about his non-Joplin experiences, but there are also some inside stories about both Big Brother and Joplin that aren't anywhere else, including some insights into their studio work as well as their concerts. Cooke was himself a musician (with the bluegrass band the Charles River Valley Boys), and the son of famed journalist/broadcaster Alistair Cooke.

***R. Crumb: The Complete Record Cover Collection*** (W.W. Norton, 2011). Book of reproductions of the record sleeves drawn/designed by the famed comic book artist/illustrator include a few for Bay Area artists, most famously Big Brother & the Holding Company's *Cheap Thrills*.

#### **Recommended DVDs:**

***Go Ride the Music & West Pole*** (Eagle Vision, 2008). The half of this two-hour DVD relevant to this week is *West Pole*, an hour-long documentary of sorts on the San Francisco rock scene that aired on KQED on August 16, 1968 (not 1969, as the back cover states). Valuable for its filmed performances of the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Steve Miller Band, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Sons of Champlin, and Ace of Cups, haphazardly interwoven with images of Bay Area rock concerts street scenes, and scenery. The linking narration by prominent *San Francisco Chronicle* critic/*Rolling Stone* co-founder Ralph Gleason is ham-handed, however, and the overuse of psychedelic effects like solarization diminishes the quality of this otherwise historic footage. It's

paired on this DVD with another hour-long KQED program, *Go Ride the Music*, from 1970 with Jefferson Airplane and Quicksilver Messenger Service.

**The Grateful Dead, *Anthem to Beauty*** (Eagle Rock, 2005). Although part of the "classic albums" series, this actually investigates an entire era in which the Dead are usually seen to have done their finest work, from 1968's *Anthem of the Sun* through 1970's *American Beauty*. Includes interviews with the Dead's Phil Lesh and Bob Weir, as well as David Crosby.

**Janis: *The Way She Was*** (Universal, 1974). Rather basically strewn together documentary has plenty of interesting footage of her performing both on her own and with Big Brother, as well as both amusing and sad interview clips with the singer. Unfortunately this import will not play on most North American DVD players, though one imagines it should be available here eventually.

#### **Officially unavailable film of interest:**

***Revolution*** (United Artists, 1968). Pseudo-documentary of Haight-Ashbury has fitfully interesting interviews with hippies, health workers, policemen, authority figures, bewildered adults, clergy, and others. It's more interesting for the period footage of the neighborhood, particularly Golden Gate Park (and particularly Hippie Hill in Golden Gate Park). It's also of interest for the soundtrack, which has material by Mother Earth, Steve Miller, and Quicksilver Messenger Service not on their regular albums.

#### **Notable Figures (Excluding Star Musicians):**

**Richard Brautigan:** Major San Francisco-based novelist and poet did a good deal to help support local band Mad River when they were struggling, and also recites poetry on their second album.

**R. Crumb:** Most famous underground comic artist of all lived in the Bay Area in the late 1960s, and although he wasn't a big rock fan, was responsible for the cover of one of the biggest San Francisco Sound albums, Big Brother & the Holding Company's *Cheap Thrills*.

**Glyn Johns:** Renowned British engineer/producer who worked on several early Steve Miller albums. More famous for working as an engineer/producer with the Who, the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, and the Eagles.

**Abe "Voco" Kesh:** KSAN DJ and producer of Blue Cheer and Harvey Mandel. Also produced minor Bay Area bands Tongue & Groove and Savage Resurrection.

**Greil Marcus:** First reviews editor of *Rolling Stone*, and longtime Bay Area-based writer, still active as author of music and social criticism.

**Ron Polte:** Manager of Quicksilver Messenger Service.

**David Rubinson:** Columbia Records producer who worked on Moby Grape's 1960s albums, also producing the cult album *Oar* by Skip Spence after Spence left the band. Later produced Santana's first album, Elvin Bishop, Malo, and records by lesser known Bay Area acts like Lamb and Cold Blood. Also produced albums by the United States of America, Herbie Hancock, Taj Mahal, the Chambers Brothers, and the Pointer Sisters.

**Al Schmitt:** Producer of Jefferson Airplane's final four albums of the 1960s (*After Bathing at Baxter's*, *Crown of Creation*, *Blessed Its Pointed Little Head*, and *Volunteers*).

**John Simon:** Producer of Big Brother & the Holding Company's *Cheap Thrills*, which had a prolonged and troubled gestation. Also producer for the Band, Leonard Cohen, Blood, Sweat & Tears, and Simon & Garfunkel.

**Bill Thompson:** Took over management of Jefferson Airplane in 1968. Also managed Hot Tuna and, later, Jefferson Starship.

**Nik Venet:** Producer of Mad River's debut LP, sometimes partially blamed for the album not coming out as well as the band had hoped. Sometimes spelled Nick Venet; also producer of albums by many noted non-Bay Area artists, including the Beach Boys, Fred Neil, and Linda Ronstadt & the Stone Poneys.

**Week Four Audiovisual Clips** (note that some might not be played due to time restrictions):

Mother Earth: Revolution (DVD)

Big Brother & the Holding Company: Summertime/I Need a Man (DVD)

Jefferson Airplane: Ballad of Me & You & Pooneil (DVD)

Jefferson Airplane: Two Heads (DVD)

Eddie Cochran: Summertime Blues (DVD)

Blue Cheer: Summertime Blues (DVD)

Mad River: Orange Fire (CD)

The Yardbirds: Happenings Ten Years Time Ago (CD)

Jefferson Airplane: Crown of Creation (DVD)

The Grateful Dead: Mountains of the Moon (DVD)

The Grateful Dead: St. Stephen (DVD)

Country Joe & the Fish: Who Am I (DVD)

Hamilton Camp: Pride of Man (CD)

Quicksilver Messenger Service: Pride of Man (CD)

The Goldberg-Miller Blues Band: The Mother Song (DVD)

The Steve Miller Band: Your Old Lady (DVD)

The Steve Miller Band: Children of the Future (CD)

The Steve Miller Band: Baby's Calling Me Home (CD)

The Steve Miller Band: Quicksilver Girl (CD)

Mother Earth: Revolution (CD)

Lee Michaels: Hello (CD)

It's a Beautiful Day: White Bird (DVD)  
Jefferson Airplane: Lather (DVD)